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TRIBUTES PAID TO PAHALGAM VICTIMS ON ANNIVERSARY OF TERROR ATTACK

Tributes were paid on Wednesday to the 26 people who were gunned down by terrorists in Jammu & Kashmir's Pahalgam last year

INDIA WILL NEVER BOW TO TERRORISM: MODI

"Remembering the innocent lives lost in the gruesome Pahalgam terror attack on this day last year," Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on X, adding India will never bow to terror. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the nation stands united against terrorism. The European Union and the United Kingdom have expressed solidarity with the people of India

FAMED MEADOWS OF PAHALGAM BUZZING AGAIN

- Security was beefed up across the Valley, with police and paramilitary forces deployed at many places, especially the tourist hotspots
- The April 22 attack dealt a severe blow to the region's tourism industry—a key pillar of the local economy. A year down the line, the famed meadows of Pahalgam are once again buzzing with tourists

50

PAHALGAM TOURIST SPOTS WERE SHUT AFTER ATTACK. MANY ARE NOW OPEN

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

Gripping Tamil Nadu contest today for decisive mandate

T MURUGANANDHAM @Chennai

ALL arrangements are in place across the state for electing 234 members to the 17th Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly on Thursday. With around 74 lakh names deleted during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), the turnout may rise due to a reduced electorate base, though the actual participation levels will determine the final outcome. A total of 5.67 crore voters will exercise their franchise at 75,064 booths.

Chief Minister M K Stalin's DMK is facing a stiff challenge from the NDA led by former CM Edappadi Palaniswami, while actor-turned-neta Vijay is the X-factor.

A notable 14,59,039 first-time voters are expected to play a critical role, with many young people showing strong enthusiasm to cast their ballots. This engagement is further evidenced by a significant number of people travelling back to their home towns to fulfil their democratic duty.

When asked about her expectations regarding the voter turnout, Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik, addressing a press conference at the state secretariat on Wednesday, said, "Highest ever." As per sources, about 13 lakh commuters left Chennai for various parts of Tamil Nadu and neighboring states on Tuesday and Wednesday, using government and private buses and trains.

Giving an overview of the state's readiness, the CEO said there are 5,949 sensitive polling booths in 3,025 locations across the state. An official said security arrangements for these booths are already in place, including deployment of micro observers and CAPF personnel along with police personnel.

She said 3,60,068 polling personnel have been engaged for the election, and 300 companies of CAPF have also been deployed to ensure free and fair elections. Besides, 83,875 police personnel are also on election duty. The vote counting will take place at 62 centres. In response to a question, the CEO said that 4.18 lakh postal ballots have been received so far. As for social media posts, 243 rebuttals and clarifications have been issued, and 163 FIRs have been lodged. She said 2,118 URLs have been blocked by the social media monitoring team in response to complaints.

There are 249 model polling stations in the state. Of them, 325 are all-women-managed; 71 are PwD-managed; and 79 are youth-managed. Green polling stations are being piloted in certain districts.

So far, the total value of goods and cash seized stood at ₹1,262 crore, of which ₹543 crore was in cash. As for election-related complaints, 5,634 complaints have been received through the CVigil app. Of them, only 17 are pending. About 74,270 complaints received through call centres from districts, and 52 remain unresolved.

HC: No mass arrests of people

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday stayed the EC's plan to swoop down on 'troublemakers' enmasse and arrest them ahead of the first phase of polls. "It is wrong to identify someone as 'troublemaker' and arrest them on mass scale," it observed. Police can take action as per law. But the rule of the law has to be followed even for preventive arrest, the court said

ECI: Kharge issued notice

The ECI took "serious note" of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "terrorist" and issued him a "stern notice", officials said. He has been asked to explain his stand within 24 hours, they added. Kharge had accused Modi of "terrorising" political parties | **P9**

Toughest test yet for Mamata to crush challenge

SUBHENDU MAITI @Kolkata

WEST Bengal is all prepped up for a pulsating contest between Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress and the BJP on Thursday when 152 of the total 294 constituencies in the state go to polls in the first of the two-phase elections amid unprecedented security cover.

This is the first election after the Election Commission of India's controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of rolls resulted in 91 lakh deletions from the list. How it would impact the outcome is anybody's guess. Appellate tribunals added just 139 of the 27 lakh — whose names did not figure in the supplementary rolls — to the list of eligible voters in the first phase.

Of the 152 seats in the first phase, 54 in north Bengal districts of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda are seen as strongholds of the BJP. The remaining 98 seats in districts like Murshidabad, East Midnapore, West Midnapore, Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura, West Bardhaman and Birbhum, are part of the the traditional citadel of the TMC. The respective strengths of the CPM-led Left Front and the Congress will also be under test. Apart from SIR and anti-incumbency, the TMC faces serious charges like widespread corruption, poor law and order, infiltration and tribal discontent.

Due to lack of motorable roads to Vellakavi and other high-altitude villages in Kodaikanal taluk of Dindigul district, polling materials and EVMs are being carried on horses and mules. Teams must trek through a seven-kilometre rugged terrain to reach designated polling stations | EXPRESS

POLL WALL

IN TN, A 3-WAY FIGHT AND AN X-FACTOR AT PLAY | P7

ONLY 139 MORE GET TO CAST VOTE TODAY: TRIBUNAL | P10

ALL SET FOR PHASE 1 POLL, N BENGAL HOLDS KEY | P10

₹599-cr valuables seized in TN, says EC

The Election Commission on Wednesday said valuables worth ₹599 crore have been recovered as part of poll seizures in Tamil Nadu. Since the Election Seizure Management System was activated on February 26, freebies and allurements worth ₹1,072.13 crore have been recovered in West Bengal and TN, the EC said.

US tourist sexually assaulted in Kodagu, caretaker & homestay owner arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Madikeri

A US national has alleged sexual assault at a homestay in Kutta village of Kodagu district, with the case coming to light days after the incident after it was reported to the US Embassy. The police have arrested two persons, including the homestay owner, and launched a detailed investigation.

According to Kodagu police, the incident occurred on April 12 within the jurisdiction of Kutta police station near Kerala border. The primary accused, hailing from Jharkhand, who was employed as a cook and caretaker at the homestay, has been booked for sexual assault.

The homestay owner has also been arrested for allegedly failing to assist the victim promptly and attempting to suppress the incident. Both accused have been remanded to judicial custody.

It appears that there was an attempt to cover up the incident. But once the police became aware of it, action was taken, and the accused were remanded in judicial custody

Dr G Parameshwara, Home Minister

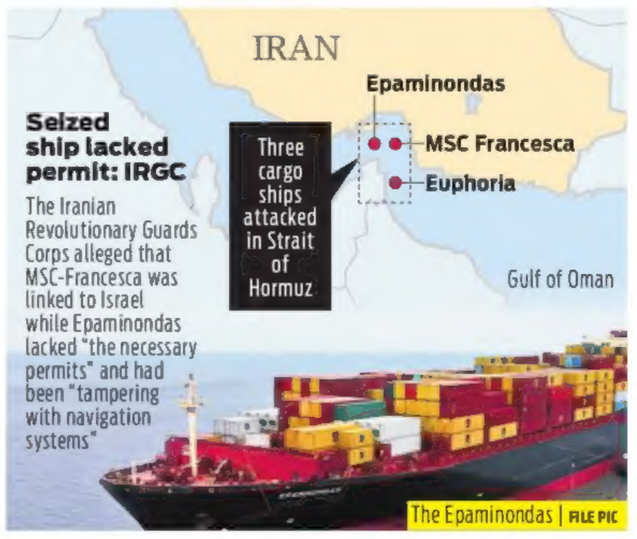
Kodagu Superintendent of Police Bindu Mani confirmed the arrests and said the investigation is going on. The police are examining all aspects, including allegations that the victim's movement was restricted and all her communication was restricted for several days after the incident.

Sources said the woman, who had booked a tent stay at the property from April 12 to April 17, reported that she was drugged and assaulted on the night of her arrival. She later informed the homestay owner, who shifted her from the tent to his residence on the premises, saying it would be safer. However, the victim alleged that she was not allowed to leave immediately and wifi at the property was disabled, limiting her ability to seek help. The woman is believed to have left the homestay on April 17 and subsequently travelled to Mysuru, from where she contacted the US Embassy. A formal complaint was registered later.

The police said the survivor is currently undergoing medical treatment, and further details will be released after the investigation progresses.

Kodagu district in-charge minister NS Boseraju directed the SP to conduct a thorough and impartial probe. Emphasising Kodagu's global reputation as a tourist destination, he called for strict action against those found guilty to ensure accountability and safeguard the district's image.

SURVIVOR APPROACHES US EMBASSY IN MYSURU: P4



Seized ship lacked permit: IRGC

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps alleged that MSC-Francesca was linked to Israel while Epaminondas lacked "the necessary permits" and had been "tampering with navigation systems"

The Epaminondas | FILE PIC

Trump extends truce, Iran seizes India-bound ship

AGENCIES @Washington/Dubai

IRAN on Wednesday fired at three cargo ships and seized two of them, including one bound for Gujarat, hours after US President Donald Trump announced that Washington was indefinitely extending its two-week ceasefire with Tehran.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards intercepted and transferred two vessels, identified as the "MSC-FRANCESCA" and the "EPAMINONDAS" (bound for Mundra port in Gujarat), to Iranian territorial waters, Iranian media reported. It comes a day after the seizure of an Iranian vessel by the US in the Sea of Oman.

Late on Tuesday night, Trump said he was extending the ceasefire at the request of Pakistan to give Tehran's leadership more time to prepare a unified proposal to end the war. "Based on the fact that the Government of Iran is seriously fractured... and, upon the request of Field Marshal Asim Munir, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, of Pakistan, we have been asked to hold our attack," President Trump said.

As for the peace talks in Islamabad, there is little clarity on when, or even if, they will take place. Trump, however, told *The New York Post* that it's possible that the second round could begin by Friday, adding the economic blockade of Iran's ports will remain in place. Sources in Pakistan told the daily talks would resume in 36-72 hours.

Iran has not confirmed if it is ready to attend the new round of talks. Its chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said it is "not possible to reopen the strait" if the US blockade of Iran's ports continue. Oil prices rose again on Wednesday with Brent North Sea climbing above $100 a barrel while West Texas Intermediate traded above $93 once again.

Meanwhile, India denied making any payments —either in cash or cryptocurrency —to Iran to secure safe passage for its vessels through the Strait of Hormuz. Two Indian vessels were fired upon as they attempted to cross the waterway on April 18. Reports said at least one ship fell victim to a scam offering fake safe passage in exchange for crypto.

DAY 54 | WAR WATCH

Lebanon attacked despite truce

Israeli strikes killed three people in Lebanon despite an ongoing 10-day ceasefire, Lebanese state media said, adding that Beirut would request an extension of the truce during upcoming talks with Israel in Washington. The two governments, which do not have diplomatic relations with each other, are set to hold a second round of talks under US auspices on Thursday **P11**

45-year-old man dies after treatment at Victoria Hosp

GAYATHRI M KURUP @Bengaluru

ALLEGED medical negligence and complications post treatment at Victoria Hospital led to the death of a 45-year-old delivery worker, Shahnawaz, on March 15. He was admitted to the hospital on February 19 with a severe infection in the scrotum, identified as Fournier's gangrene -- a rare but serious condition with poor prognosis.

According to his wife Sharly, a procedure was performed, but Shahnawaz was discharged on March 3 before he could recover fully and his stitches healed. He was referred to the plastic surgery department, but was not admitted as the wound was not considered healthy enough for further surgery.

The family reportedly stayed on the hospital premises for a few days seeking help, but as they were turned away, they had to return home. Sharly said that at home, the stitches opened suddenly on March 15 and Shahnawaz started bleeding excessively. He died within minutes.

Medical Superintendent of Victoria Hospital Dr Deepak S told *TNIE* that a committee has been formed to investigate the case. "The patient's wife approached me, stating that her husband was discharged prematurely. We have constituted a committee of three senior professors from medicine, surgery and plastic surgery to review all records, case sheets and take inputs from doctors and the family," he said.

"Fournier's gangrene is a very serious infection of the scrotum with poor prognosis. The standard treatment involves multiple sittings to remove dead tissue, followed by plastic surgery once the wound becomes infection-free and healthy," he said. **P6**

Didi's I-PAC raid dharna 'harmed democracy': SC

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday rapped West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her alleged interference in the Enforcement Directorate raids at political consultancy firm I-PAC's office in Kolkata earlier this year.

Noting that such actions harm democracy, a bench of justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and N V Anjaria said: "A chief minister cannot walk into the midst of an investigation, put the democracy in peril, and then say don't convert this into a dispute between the state and the Union."

The bench made the strong oral remarks while hearing the writ petitions filed by the ED and its officers under Article 32 of the Constitution seeking a CBI probe against Banerjee and her officials.

Senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy, appearing for a West Bengal official, questioned the maintainability of ED's plea, saying the dispute is between the Centre and state and should be resolved under Article 131.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, for another Bengal official, argued the ED can't invoke fundamental rights under Article 32.

The bench, while rejecting the respondents' arguments, said it can't shut its eyes to the ground realities in Bengal.

EXPRESS READ

Govt notifies online gaming Rules 2026

New Delhi: The government on Wednesday notified rules to regulate the digital gaming ecosystem under the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming (PROG) Act, 2025 | **P12**

SSLC exam-1 results to be out today

Bengaluru: The SSLC exam-1 results will be announced on Thursday afternoon and the results will be available online after School Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangarappa's press meet at 12 noon. "We will follow allotting marks for third language, including Hindi, in SSLC exams for this academic year 2025-26. The grace marks issue will be discussed and announced tomorrow in the press meet," Bangarappa said. The state government has made it clear that the total marks will be 625 instead of 525 | **P7**

Govt to conduct student elections

Bengaluru: Ministers MC Sudhakar and Dr Sharan Prakash Patil said the government would conduct student union elections as per the recommendations of the JM Lyngdoh Committee report | **P2**

DIRECT

DELHI-BEIJING FLIGHTS RESUME

Air China has resumed its non-stop Delhi-Beijing flight, reconnecting the flight services between the two capitals. Flights will operate on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, the airline said